



Department of German, Nordic, and Slavic+

Scandinavian Studies Newsletter

Fall 2025

Volume xxxi, Issue 1



Greetings from the Program Chair

Dear friends of Scandinavian Studies,

As most of you already know, this year marks the 150th anniversary of Scandinavian Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the oldest program of its kind in the world. We are exceedingly proud of our program. We might be small, but we continuously punch above our weight class, and it is impressive what we have accomplished over the past 150 years: the tens of thousands of students who have taken our classes, the groundbreaking research conducted by our faculty, and the ways in which we and our alumni have impacted the university, the state, and beyond.

Today, we are as strong as ever. Students are eager to take our classes and our faculty are among the best in their fields. And we want to continue that: to be as strong and impactful in the future as we have been in the past and are at present. But we can't do it alone. We need your help and support.

Given the economic landscape of 2025, private philanthropy is what helps our department remain in strong standing. Your support makes it possible for us to continue the kinds of work you'll see featured in this newsletter: innovative instruction, cutting-edge research, community-building within and beyond campus, and preparing students to engage meaningfully with their work and the world.

So please, consider donating, and help look forward, as we also do in this newsletter, to the next 150 years of Scandinavian Studies at UW-Madison.

- Program Chair, Claus Elholm Andersen

Photo credits:

Cover photo: Pedestrians and students walk among the colors of the fall leaves near Library Mall at the University of Wisconsin-Madison during autumn on October 28, 2021. (Photo by Bryce Richter / UW-Madison)

Above: Small leaves from a maple tree shine in the sunlight at the Lost City Forest at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Arboretum during spring on May 2, 2020. (Photo by Bryce Richter / UW-Madison)

In This Issue

2025

*Newsletter is available online at
gns.wisc.edu/gns-newsletters*

Page 4: **150th Anniversary of Scandinavian Studies**

Page 6: **Recent Publications**

Page 8: **Summer Launch - Sweden: Learning Without Borders**

Page 9: **Recovering our WITS**

Page 10: **An Interview with Silje Solheim Karlsen**

Page 12: **Instructor interviews of current majors and certificates**

Page 14: **Interviews and profiles of engaged alumni**

Page 17: **Notes from the Field**

Page 22: **Teaching: New(ish) Courses**

Page 24: **Faculty and Staff Updates**

Page 28: **Graduate Student Updates**

Page 31: **Degree earners in Spring/Summer 2025**

Follow us on Instagram for Nordic-specific events and updates!

[@nordicuwmadison](https://www.instagram.com/nordicuwmadison)



Please enjoy our 2025 Newsletters, which commemorate 150 years of Scandinavian Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

The Spring 2025 Newsletter, "Looking Back," examined our history.

The Fall 2025 Newsletter, "Looking Forward," considers our future.

If you would like to make a donation to the program or to the Anniversary Year programming, please scan this QR code:



Or follow this link: <https://secure.supportuw.org/give/> and choose Scandinavian Studies Centennial Fund 132731590. Or send a check to:

Scandinavian Studies Anniversary Year
Claus Andersen, Scandinavian Studies chair
Department of German, Nordic, and Slavic+
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Van Hise Hall
1440 Linden Drive
Madison WI 53706 USA

Scandinavian Day

Dear friends of Scandinavian Studies,

It is our pleasure to invite you to join us for Scandinavian Day at UW-Madison on Friday, November 14. We are excited to honor the past, present, and future of this program, which is now the vibrant Nordic Unit of the Department of German, Nordic and Slavic+ .

[CLICK HERE FOR YOUR INVITATION.](#)

Scandinavian Day will begin with several free opportunities in the morning, including a chance to sit in on a popular Nordic Unit undergraduate class, and to visit the recently renovated Madsen Reading Room on the 13th floor of Van Hise Hall.

The afternoon will feature three hour-long sessions, and you'll be able to choose from the options below, all led by UW-Madison experts. These will be held in the Fluno Center, Memorial Union and the Chazen Museum of Art. There is a \$40 fee to attend.

- Dealing with Disney: Ensuring Quality Representation of Sámi Culture in Disney's Frozen II. Thomas A. DuBois.
- How Thor Got His Hammer – An introduction to Nordic Mythology. Scott A. Mellor.
- Scandinavian Art in the Chazen Museum of Art. Berit Ness.
- My Viking longship journey: singing in Nordic languages. Mimmi Fulmer.
- "Swedish Pancakes for Breakfast?" Marcus Cederstrom.
- Norwegian 101. Ida Moen Johnson.
- Hygge, Health, and Happiness. Claus E. Andersen.
- Rasmus B. Anderson and the First U.S. Scandinavian Studies Department. Susan Brantley.
- The Teacher's Revolt against Nazism in Occupied Norway. Dean Krouk.

You're cordially invited to a reception and Scandinavian-inspired buffet dinner at the Fluno Center starting at 5:00. The evening's program will include a musical performance and a salute to past and present members of the Scandinavian Studies faculty. Tickets for the reception and dinner are \$60, with a reduced rate of \$40 for students. Sponsored tables of 8 are also available.

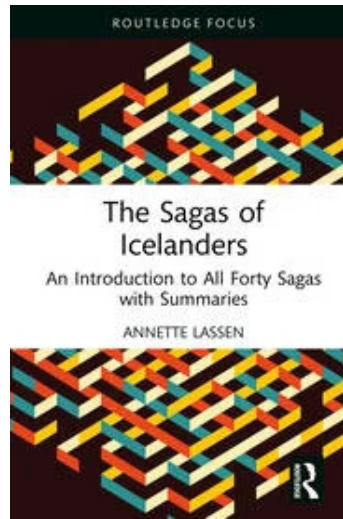
For more information about all of the activities planned for November 14, please go to our [150th Anniversary webpage](#) on the German, Nordic and Slavic+ Department site. [Online registration](#) through the Fluno Center is available. We encourage you to register ASAP, as space is limited.

If you have questions, please email Claus Elholm Andersen, ceandersen2@wisc.edu.

Med vennlig hilsen (Norwegian) Med vänliga hälsningar (Swedish) Med venlig hilsen (Danish) Ystävällisin terveisin (Finnish) Virðingarfyllst (Icelandic),

The Nordic Unit

Recent Publications



The Sagas of Icelanders: An Introduction to All Forty Sagas with Summaries

by Annette Lassen

Translated by Marianne Kalinke and Kirsten Wolf

Published in December 2024 by Routledge

Article by Professor Kirsten Wolf

In 2020, I was asked by the journal *Speculum* to review a four-volume work by Annette Lassen. The first volume, *Islændingsagaernes verden*, was a short monograph on the world of the Sagas of Icelanders. The other three volumes contained translations into Danish by a number of scholars of a variety of Sagas of Icelanders. I concluded my review by writing that “a lot of ground is covered in this slender first volume, and it would be wonderful if it could be translated into English. It would be a superb textbook in English-speaking countries for both graduate and undergraduate students in courses on medieval Icelandic literature and the Sagas and Tales of Icelanders in particular.” Annette subsequently

contacted me about finding a translator of that first volume. I volunteered and talked my friend and colleague Marianne Kalinke into participating as well. I translated and Marianne polished. The work, however, involved more than just translating and polishing, as *Islændingsagaernes verden* was written for a Danish readership, so we had to adapt it to an English readership, which involved, for example, substituting references to Danish primary and secondary literature with references to works in English. Annette, Marianne, and I are happy with the result, and I fully expect that the book will now be used as a textbook in English-speaking countries.



The Not-Quite Child: Colonial Histories, Racialization, and Swedish Exceptionalism

by Liina-Ly Roos

Published in August 2025 by University of Washington Press

Figures like Pippi Longstocking and Greta Thunberg exemplify an ideal mainstream Swedish childhood: they are autonomous, competent, and the voices of moral truths. In this book, Liina-Ly Roos analyzes the figure of the “not-quite child”—children who, while appearing white, have been marginalized due to historical racialization and colonialism—to challenge this established ideal. Through analyses of films and literature that portray Indigenous Sámi, Tornedalian, and Finnish-speaking children, *The Not-Quite Child* reveals how these figures disrupt the normative understanding of growing up in Sweden. These cultural texts are filled with tensions of assimilation, invisibility, and the struggle to grow in a society that demands conformity to a specific “Swedishness.”

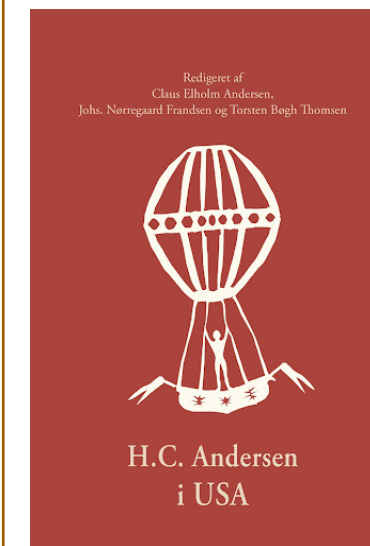
The children in these stories are both minoritized and, at the same time, have the privilege of passing, and share a long cultural history with and within the dominant culture. Through nuanced attention to these important narratives, *The Not-Quite Child* contributes to dialogue on the complexities of identity, race, and the hidden colonial legacies that continue to shape understandings of childhood in Sweden.

Through a Lens Innocently: Race in Swedish Documentary Film and Visual Activism

by Benjamin Mier-Cruz

Forthcoming from the University of Wisconsin Press

Through a Lens Innocently: Race in Swedish Documentary Film and Visual Activism takes readers inside the world of Swedish film to ask urgent questions about race, equality, and who is telling the stories of marginalized communities. For decades, Sweden has celebrated its image as one of the world’s most equal and “colorblind” societies. Yet this reputation has allowed white filmmakers to gain authority and global recognition for documenting the lives and struggles of people of color—both in Sweden and abroad—while often overlooking how these communities see themselves. This book also turns the spotlight on a new generation of Swedish filmmakers of color who are reclaiming the camera. Through powerful short films, they capture everyday experiences of racism in a country that denies race as a social reality. Blending film analysis with questions of justice and representation, *Through a Lens Innocently* reveals how stories told on screen can both reinforce and challenge national myths. It is a book about who gets to be visible, who gets to speak, and how film can spark change.



H.C. Andersen i USA

Edited by Claus Elholm Andersen, Johs. Nørregaard-Frandsen, and Torsten Bøgh Thomsen

Published in 2025 by University of Southern Denmark Press

Hans Christian Andersen never managed to visit the USA himself, although he imagined and dreamed of it. However, his art and his reputation as a storyteller for children were firmly established in the USA during his lifetime.

In this new anthology co-edited by UW-Madison Professor Claus Elholm Andersen, 12 scholars, translators, and writers seek to describe H.C. Andersen as a celebrated author, myth, and icon in the USA, while also exploring the paths and pitfalls of translation. His fairy tales and stories were introduced in the USA as early as the 1840s. They are still published today in new editions and large print runs. His life and work have been dramatized in major Hollywood films, while Disney and others have created spectacular and profitable animations

based on his works. Andersen is taught at many levels of the school system. Finally, there are a number of monuments and statues honoring Andersen in the US.

There are many versions of Andersen as an icon, many interpretations and ideas about the poet and the person in the US. Translations and retellings of his fairytales have created a multitude of interpretations and reimaginings of Andersen, pointing to his lasting relevance, and to what happens when stories travel across time and place. That is what the anthology *H.C. Andersen in the USA* is all about.



En dissonans i denne verden. Læsninger i H.C. Andersens tidlige eventyr

by Claus Elholm Andersen
Published in 2025 by Aarhus University Press

In *A Dissonance in This World: Readings in Hans Christian Andersen’s Early Fairy Tales*, Claus Elholm Andersen reveals how Andersen’s best-known stories are far more political than they first appear. Andersen was a stylistic innovator who used his tales to critique capitalism, the bourgeoisie, and the establishment, while observing the inequalities and power structures of his time. His critique emerges through fractures, contradictions, and, above all, a deliberate dissonance within the narratives.

Through close readings of twelve of Andersen’s most famous fairy tales, this book shows how these stories are not simply children’s literature but works that carry deep social and political resonance. By highlighting their tensions and dissonances, Claus Andersen demonstrates how the tales speak both to the world in which they were written and to contemporary debates on power and inequality.

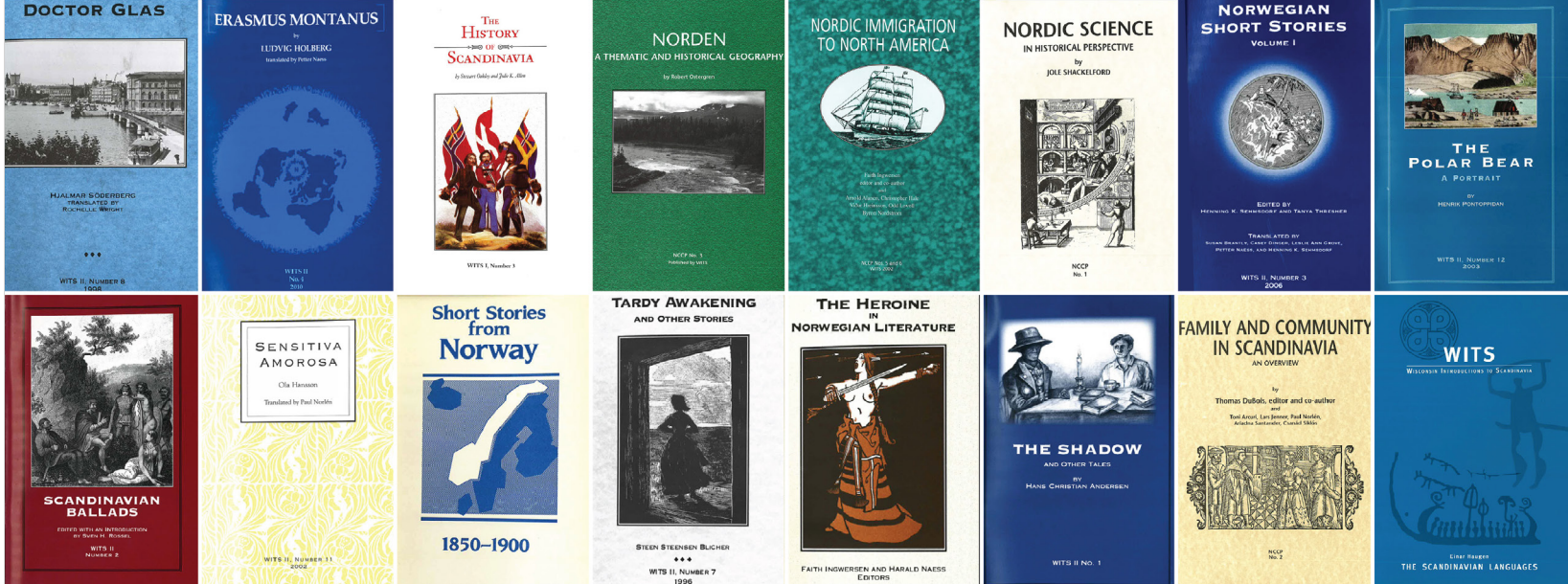


Summer Launch - Sweden: Learning Without Borders

By Scott Mellor

This past summer, ten incoming UW–Madison students kicked off their college experience in Sweden through the Summer Launch – Sweden program. Designed to show that learning happens everywhere—not just on campus—the program immersed students in Nordic history and culture. The course, “An Introduction to Scandinavia: Vikings to Empire,” explored Sweden’s transformation from Viking clans to medieval kingdoms, through the Reformation, and into its imperial conflicts with Russia that have shaped today’s political landscape. The study abroad program is based in Stockholm but makes trips to Uppsala; Visby, Gotland; and Tallinn, Estonia as well.

With Sweden and Finland’s recent entry into NATO and the Nordic region’s growing global relevance, students gained timely insights into the region’s historical foundations. The small group, representing diverse academic interests from international relations to engineering, bonded through shared experiences and cultural exploration. Seeing historical sites and artifacts in person brought the material to life, creating a “living history” environment. The program fostered both academic growth and community—an unforgettable start to students’ UW journey.



Recovering our WITS

By Susan Brantly and Jenna Sorensen

The Wisconsin Introductions to Scandinavia (WITS) series was created to provide quality textbooks and translations pertaining to Scandinavian culture for use in American classrooms. Back in the 1980s, the publishing market simply could not sustain such a thing, so the Department of Scandinavian Studies took matters into their own hands. WITS I (part one) provided short and authoritative introductions to various aspects of Scandinavian life and civilization. The series drew on the expertise of Scandinavian scholars from across the country. WITS II (part two) focused primarily on literary translations, ensuring that students had access to classics of Scandinavian literature which were prone to going out of print, if they were available at all. In the 1990s, with the support of the Nordic Council of Ministers, a new series related to WITS I evolved called the Nordic Culture Curriculum Project. Again, distinguished scholars from all over the world contributed to this series, which continued to be overseen by faculty members of the Scandinavian Department at the University of Wisconsin. For decades, WITS paid for itself, but changes in the publication world made this locally printed and marketed series unsustainable.

In honor of the 150th anniversary of Scandinavian Studies at UW-Madison, the Nordic Unit is taking steps to make these texts accessible to the public. Susan Brantly has tracked down old works before they disappeared, Natalie Chakar scanned them in, and Jenna Sorensen has constructed a website that will make the texts available at gns.wisc.edu/wits-books-2. Go and have a look! You will see a number of familiar names and enjoy such classics as Einar Haugen’s *Scandinavian Languages*, *Nordic Immigration to North America* by Faith Ingwersen et al., *Norwegian Short Stories* edited by Henning Sehmsdorf and Tanya Thresher, Hjalmar Söderberg’s *Doctor Glas* translated by Rochelle Wright, and *Sex and the Modern Breakthrough* edited by Susan Brantly—to name just a few.

An Interview with Silje Solheim Karlsen

By Cait Vitale-Sullivan

On September 25th, I sat down with Professor Silje Solheim Karlsen on Bascom hill in the unseasonably warm autumn sunshine. Silje has joined the UW Nordic department for the Fall 2025 semester to teach Arctic Literature, specifically that from the Nordkalotten region, which extends across northern Norway, Sweden, and Finland. She comes from Alta, Norway, where she is a professor of Nordic Literature for teacher training at the Alta campus of the University of Tromsø as well as at Sámi Allaskuvva, the Sámi University of Applied Sciences. This interview was conducted in Norwegian and has been translated and edited for clarity. Quotes from Silje are noted in italics; other aspects of our conversation are summarized by me. I have also included some historical background, especially about the Alta River dam project, to provide context for the reader.

As a child in Alta, Silje grew up with a great appetite for reading. Living in a forest with her parents, two older sisters, and a family dog, reading was an important form of entertainment. She lost herself in this world of books, and in the process, established a deep relationship with literature. Her ties to Sámi literature developed more slowly. When, at the age of 14, she learned of her own family's Sámi background, her path into Sámi literature opened.

When she moved from Alta in the far North to Kristiansand in the far South to study, her student apartment was papered with pages copied from Nils Aslak Valeapää's poem collection, *The Sun My Father*¹. Surrounded by the Sámi poet's words, she studied Nordic literature before moving back to Alta.

Sámi literature has been a slow growing field and has been, and continues to be, greatly impacted by events in Sápmi. One of these events was the Alta dam project. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, a hydroelectric dam project was proposed for the Alta river². The proposed dam would completely flood the village of Máze, a primarily Sámi village, disrupt reindeer grazing lands, and would impact the ecosystem health of the entire Alta-Kautokeino river basin. Protesters from Alta and Máze gathered, joined by indigenous leaders, environmentalists, and others from around the country and the world. Protesters participated in hunger strikes outside of the Norwegian Parliament in Oslo, and in



January of 1981, more than 1,000 protesters chained themselves together outside of the work site in Alta. The Norwegian government sent 600 police to forcibly remove protestors, the largest police action in Norway's history. The dam was completed in 1987, and though it did not flood the town of Máze, this event was a catalyst for Sámi rights movements.

"After the Alta situation, there came a flood of literature out of Sápmi. There was more understanding of Sámi experiences, more organizing, more political rights. But I think that the children of that generation, who are adults now, don't feel the same shame of their Sámi identities that was felt by the prior generations. They are more open to showing their culture in all forms and expressions. I think it is this generation that has caused the flowering of Sámi literature."

This increase in literature has been met with several initiatives from the Sámi parliament in Norway to increase money devoted to publishing books. Recently, the Norwegian Silje believes that it is important that Sámi and Kven literature are available to both readers and teachers in Norway.

"We train teachers for the whole of Norway. Sámi literature has not been included in schools in Norway, in the South but also in the North. It is important that we read Sámi literature with our Education students and that they then read these books with their students. By having a greater variety of literature [children's and young adult books, poetry, fiction, fantasy, novels] it allows more children to connect and see themselves in the stories. This is especially important for Sámi children, but it is also impactful for Norwegian children. It [Sámi literature] really involves everything- cultural understanding, empathy, better understanding of the situation in Sápmi, why things are the way they are, why there are conflicts."

Here at UW Madison, Silje is bringing the world of Nordkalotten into the classroom and sharing prose and poetry with students. She is excited to experience the new teaching environment.

"Students here have much different backgrounds than students who I work with [in Norway]. People ask questions that I don't expect and I have to be ready for conversations to go in different directions that I had anticipated. I think that is really nice."

She has also had the opportunity to visit with educators at a teacher inservice day at College of Menomonee Nation. There, she gave a presentation on a new book called "Sameproblem" by Kathrine Nederjord on how difficult it has been to be Sámi in Norway.

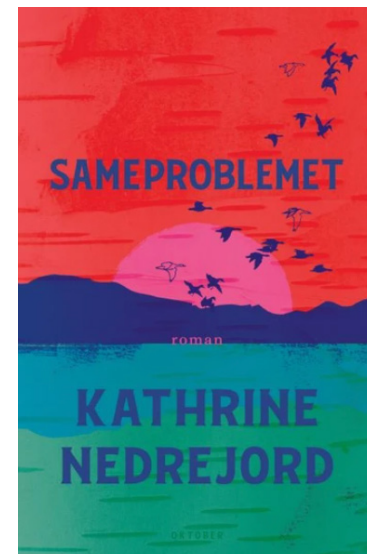
"This book is very very sad and very important. It was special to share it with teachers at Menomonee nation because of the similarities faced by indigenous people in the US and the Sámi in Norway and there were many there who see themselves, their culture, and their histories with boarding schools and other challenges in [Nederjord's] story."

Of course, we ended up talking about book recommendations. She had several tips for anyone who is interested in reading more Sámi literature.

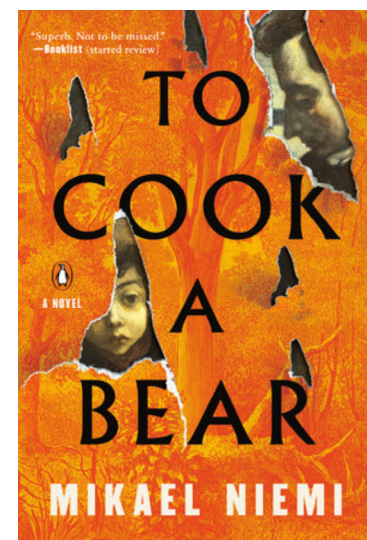
"If you can read Norwegian, I would definitely recommend 'Sameproblem' by Kathrine Nederjord. If not, there are not so many Sámi books translated to English. One of these is the young adult book 'In Between Worlds' by Máret Anne Sara. Another book, which is a bit of a hybrid book, is 'To Cook a Bear' by Mikael Niemi."



In Between Worlds
maretannesara.com/in-between-worlds/



Sameproblem
norla.no/en/books/1628-the-sami-problem



To Cook a Bear
penguinrandomhouse.com/books/599207/to-cook-a-bear-by-mikael-niemi/

¹ Beaivi, Áhčážan

² Áltáeatnu (North Sámi), Alattionjoki (Kven)

³ The Sámi Problem

◆ Instructor interviews of current majors and certificates ◆

Eliana Sauer, interviewed by Liina-Ly Roos

Liina-Ly: What is your year and major, and what certificates are you pursuing?

Eliana: My name is Eliana Sauer, and I am a senior this year. I am an International Studies and Environmental Studies double major with Certificates in Global Health, European Studies, Languages and Cultures of Northern Europe, Educational Policy Studies, and Political Science.

Liina-Ly: Why did you decide to get the Certificate in Languages and Cultures of Northern Europe?

Eliana: Well, I wanted to take Swedish my sophomore year because I knew that I wanted to study abroad there, and I wanted to have a little bit of language knowledge, and I fully envisioned studying for one semester, going to Sweden, and then moving on. But then I came back after being abroad and really missed learning Swedish and missed the environment of the small class. So I went back and realized that I basically had this Certificate with the classes that I took abroad and the language. It has all been really interesting, so I was happy to add a couple more classes.

Liina-Ly: What do you value most about the program?

Eliana: I have really appreciated how specialized all of the professors have been. Everybody is just so passionate about specific things, and it's really exciting to get to learn from people who are so involved and interested.

Liina-Ly: Can you tell about a particular memory in the program that has stayed with you?

Eliana: Yes, I took 4th Semester Swedish this past spring with Benjamin Mier-Cruz and one other student. One of my favorite memories is when the other student and I wanted to make our own news program (like the Swedish ones we watched) and Benjamin was like, "Of course, sure, do it." So we went and filmed on scene at Memorial Union in Swedish, and then we got to watch it in class. I hadn't seen it until the first viewing, so it was really fun to see how it turned out and watch Benjamin react to it.

Liina-Ly: Has studying in this program affected you in unexpected ways?



Eliana Sauer

Eliana: Definitely, yes. I had taken French for a very long time and was just not so passionate about it. Swedish was completely different. I would love to be able to get a job where I could speak some Swedish and interact with Swedes. So, that's one way that it's shifted my career prospects. It's also been really special to meet other students who have the same interests. In all my Scandinavian studies classes, it feels like we're all here because we want to know the topic.

Liina-Ly: How do you hope to use your degree in the future, career, or otherwise?

Eliana: I would love to work in Swedish, with Swedes, in Sweden. And just with Scandinavian affairs in general. While I was abroad, I took a Swedish politics class and my professor came up to me afterwards and said that if I want to study this, I could really be the expert in it. And that stuck with me a lot. The idea that it is a niche skill, but it can be really useful to people who are looking for it. So, yes, I'm hoping to do something to put that knowledge to the test.

Audrey Wilson, interviewed by Dean Krouk

Dean: Why did you decide to major in Scandinavian Studies?

Audrey: I need at least three semesters of a foreign language in order to graduate, so my first semester here I was actually enrolled in Spanish. However, I figured that if I was going to spend three semesters working towards a language I should get something out of it, and they only offer Spanish certificates if you're in the business school. I found out that UW-Madison offered Norwegian as a language, and I have quite a bit of Norwegian heritage, so I decided to start taking the classes when I was a sophomore and declared the certificate.

Throughout my first two years here I ended up switching my majors and certificates a lot. I actually started out with Chemical Engineering and am now a double major with Scand Studies and Theatre. I decided to switch the certificate to a major in Scand Studies because I found that there are a lot more career opportunities that are available to me than I thought, and living in Norway is a realistic possibility for me now that I've learned the language. I'm still figuring out what I want to do specifically, but I think getting a major in Scandinavian Studies will be extremely beneficial for my goals.

Dean: What do you value most about the program?

Audrey: I really value the relationships I've been able to make within the program. Because the department is relatively small, I've had repeat professors that I've gotten to know pretty well, and I feel like everyone I've talked to cares so much about not only my education but me as a person. The positive feedback and constructive criticism I've received throughout my time in the program is so valued and makes me feel confident that I've chosen the right path to take.

Dean: Can you tell me about a particular memory from the program that has stayed with you?

Audrey: Even before declaring the major I knew that I wanted to study abroad if given the chance. This program helped me fulfill that goal, and this past summer I was able to study in Norway with the International Summer School at the University of Oslo. Being able to see my hard work in my Norwegian classes pay off in an active and applicable way was



Audrey Wilson (left) with friends in Oslo, summer 2025.

absolutely amazing, and I wouldn't have been able to do so without the help of the program and my professors.

Dean: Has studying Scandinavian Studies affected you in unexpected ways?

Audrey: I would say my whole outlook on my life has changed due to studying Scandinavian Studies. Before starting, I just vaguely knew that I'm part Norwegian and that there are some countries in Europe called Scandinavia. Now I actually feel connected to that part of my heritage, and I have a clearer goal with what I want to do and where I want to do it.

Dean: How do you hope to use your degree in the future – career or otherwise?

Audrey: In addition to using the language aspect of my degree in order to obtain further education in Norway, I hope to find a career in legal studies or human rights on an international basis. I also hope to live in Norway full-time after I get my graduate degree, and this program has opened the door to that opportunity.

Liel Hagen, interviewed by Dean Krouk



Liel Hagen.

Dean: Why did you decide to study Scandinavian Studies?

Liel: I was born and raised in Norway and moved to the US when I was about 11-12 years old. I was originally just getting my BSW (Bachelor of Social Work), however, when I learned more about the Scandinavian Studies program, I immediately jumped at the opportunity. Of course, it was a big bonus that Norwegian was my first language so I was already meeting the language requirement, but what intrigued me the most about the program was experiencing Scandinavian culture through a different lens. Moreover, appreciating Norwegian culture through other individuals in my class who weren't as familiar with it. I also realized more and more how difficult my dialect is to understand for non-native speakers!

Dean: Can you tell me about a particular memory from the program that has stayed with you?

Liel: One of my all time favorite memories is when I was a guest speaker in a course and got to speak about Russetiden, the various dialects in Norway, and Friluftsliv (outdoor life). I loved seeing the students'

faces when I spoke about the many challenges that Norwegians will do right before their high school graduation (called Russetiden), and how for each challenge they complete, they get to tie an item to the string attached to their hat. For example, getting to tie a McDonalds happy meal toy after going through the drive thru in a shopping cart.

Dean: How did Scandinavian Studies affect you in unexpected ways?

Liel: I loved all the professors that I had. I especially enjoyed the Hans Christian Anderson class taught by Nete Schmidt or other classes about Scandinavian folklore!

Dean: How has your Scandinavian Studies experience been relevant or interesting in terms of your career?

Liel: I work as a social worker in a therapeutic day school and specialize in early childhood trauma. While Scandinavian Studies is not directly related to my current field, it continues to be a pillar in my life in other ways. I go back home to Norway once or twice a year, and I still thoroughly enjoy sharing my culture with others. I've led social work groups where I've talked about the Janteloven / the Law of Jante, and the pros and cons of it. I've had conversations about how coming from a curious standpoint and continuing to expose yourself to new and old cultures, languages, and traditions is vital to human connections. We can learn so much from each other and I'm grateful to the UW-Madison Scandinavian Studies Program for building a bridge to do just that!

Jackson Crawford, interviewed by Susan Brantly



Jackson Crawford.

Jackson Crawford earned his PhD in Scandinavian Studies, with a concentration in philology, in 2014.

Susan: Why did you decide to get a Ph.D. in Scandinavian Studies?

Jackson: I did my M.A. in linguistics (focusing on historical linguistics) at the University of Georgia, and my advisor there, Jared Klein, said that based on my interests, I should go to a linguistics Ph.D. program to be the Old Norse person or a Scandinavian Ph.D. program to be the historical linguistics person. I applied to both kinds of departments, and being the latter type of person at Wisconsin seemed like the best fit.

Susan: What did you value most about the program?

Jackson: One kind of class I had, that I don't think is offered everywhere, was one with Julie Allen, in which we as grad students were prepared for what departments would be looking at on our CVs when we started applying for jobs. We also got training in how to pick and follow the right scholarly journals. That kind of "meta" training in how to be a scholar was valuable both in and after my employment at universities, and I think would benefit anyone looking to get an advanced degree.

Susan: Can you tell about a particular experience in the program that has stayed with you?

Jackson: My experience as the Teaching Assistant in residence at Norden, the Scandinavian-language

dormitory, was a fun way to meet many smart people, and I learned a lot about the contemporary languages and cultures of Scandinavia.

Susan: Has studying Scandinavian Studies affected you in unexpected ways?

Jackson: When I defended my dissertation in 2014, I couldn't have expected anything that came in the next 11-and-a-half years.

I've been given the means to find information that a lot of people are interested in, but don't know where to look for. In an information environment that is getting worse and less reliable both online and offline, I want to help people find good information about the subjects I know well, and I want to model to them what looking for good information and presenting it responsibly looks like. The capital-T Truth might not be out there, but the facts are, and it's more important to get the facts right than to stoke our own egos.

I took a novel path with my degree once I realized that I was going to be moving every year for the rest of my life, taking lecturer jobs at one university after another. I enjoyed teaching and wanted to make use of my skills, and while I was teaching at Berkeley (2015-17), I started a YouTube channel to try to get good information out to the public about Norse mythology, language, etc. There is a lot of interest out there but most of the "answers" that people can find online (which is the only place anyone looks anymore) are from self-interested gurus, not from people who can even read Old Norse. By 2020 I was making enough from donations to the channel (on Patreon) to pay my bills, and I took a chance on making it my full-time job. It's a surprisingly busy schedule keeping a YouTube channel going, especially when I don't let the drive to reach more people let me make up facts—I want to point people to real sources (and as much as possible, interview the people publishing new findings rather than trying to speak for them). Along the way, YouTube has earned me a small amount of recognition among people interested in these subjects, which has occasionally led to consulting on major media productions (a Disney movie, an Ubisoft game), and to some readership for my translations of Norse myths and sagas, published by Hackett Publishing Company. (See [JacksonWCrawford.com](https://www.jacksonwcrawford.com))

Mark Pallatt, interviewed by Susan Brantly



Mark Pallatt.

Mark Pallatt earned his BA in Scandinavian Studies in 1992.

Susan: So, I heard you went out to work in Hollywood?

Mark: Yes, I made the move to Los Angeles in 1994 and never looked back. I've been very fortunate working in film and television, but these last few years certainly have been very challenging. I do my best for my family and my two children. Life is pretty good here in Los Angeles although I sure miss the Midwest, my home of Minneapolis, and Madison.

Susan: Any chances to use your Swedish skills?

Mark: I had in the beginning out here many actual Swedish friends who were here for various reasons and while I still practice and occasionally spit out a few words and sentences, it's been a while since I've spoken and written Swedish, but I still have a place in my heart for my love of

Sweden and Scandinavia. From time to time there will be a Swedish actor or actress on set where I'm working, Joel Kinnaman in particular from the TV series *For all Mankind*. He and I would speak a little Swedish when we crossed paths in the hallways. The most memorable occasion was at the onset of Covid while we were filming on location at an old Toyota assembly and corporate plant. We spoke at length about our love for golden retrievers, and of course, the chaos of Covid that was just erupting around all of us. An actor and a film technician, but also a human and a human discussing the craziness that seemed to be engulfing everyone. He is one down to earth, cool cat for sure.

Susan: Did you ever try acting?

Mark: I took a stab at acting again and ended up in a senior thesis project—a fable that took place in 15th century Norway, so I got to use my language skills for a couple of scenes. It's called "The Tale of the Red Knight Castle."

Susan: Who else have you worked with? Go ahead and drop some names....

Mark: When I worked on *Allie McBeal* for five seasons in Manhattan Beach in the late 90s, I was known as the Swede-a-holic. I threw crayfish parties that my Swedish friends said were above and beyond any they had seen back home in Sweden. I've worked alongside many famous and fascinating actors and celebrities like Roy Scheider, Pamela Anderson, Keanu Reeves, Calista Flockhart, Robert De Niro, John Lithgow, and Ashley Judd, to name a few, in addition to probably thousands of wonderful, fantastic creative crew members whose faces I see but names I don't recall. Talk about instant professional collaboration to "get things done." It's a great experience and life skill I hope to pass on to my children.

Notes from the Field

This piece is part of our ongoing "Field Notes" series, in which faculty, staff, and students report on their research.

Kirsten Wolf

I have two projects in the works:

The Viking Age: A Survival Guide

In the fall of 2024, I was asked by O'Mara Books to write the first book in a new series, in which one has to go back in time with 30 days to survive. Not surprisingly, I was tasked with the Viking Age. I had previously written *24 Hours in the Viking Age: A Day in the Life of the People Who Lived There* for O'Mara (2024). The new book has been a little more challenging: the press insisted that I write in the second person, which I have never done before. I now have a draft of the book and hope to submit my final version this fall. Here is an excerpt about day 1:

"You wake slowly, a deep chill settling in your bones. Something feels off – very off. There is no soft mattress beneath you, no warm blankets wrapped around you, and no pillow under your head. Instead you lie flat on the hard ground, the sharp bite of the cold air making you shiver. A dull ache pulses in your lower back, and as you shift slightly, you realize the cause – a small rock pressing uncomfortably against you. You stretch out your arms, fingers brushing against sand and pebbles. Wherever you are, it is not home. Finally, you open your eyes and realize that there is daylight, even though the sun is low in the sky to your left. You are totally confused, but eventually you manage to sit up and look around. To the right, there is a narrow sandy beach all pebbled with small rocks and stones.

Out towards the sea, there are a number of small islands or skerries not very far away from the coastline. Some of them are covered with grass or small trees, while others are totally barren and look just like rocks sticking out from the sea. Again, you look to the left and see a thickly covered forest above some cliffs. You wonder if you are dreaming, so you pinch yourself here and there, but no, this is not a dream. This is all so unreal. What is going on?"

Reykjahólabók: A Harvest of Low German Legends in Iceland

In 2023, Brepols established a series dedicated to Old Norse-Icelandic hagiographic texts in English translation. Marianne Kalinke, Professor Emerita at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and I decided to continue with our translations of legends in *Reykjahólabók*, an Icelandic codex from around 1500, containing translations of a now-lost Low German legendary written in a weird mix of Icelandic, Norwegian, and Low German. We had previously published a book of translations of some of the legends (*Pious Fictions and Pseudo-Saints in the Late Middle Ages: Selected Legends from an Icelandic Legendary*, 2024). In this new book, we offer translations of the legends of St. Roch, Gregory the Great, Ambrose, Augustin, Erasmus, Nicholas of Tolentino, Anthony, Dominic, and Emerentia, Anna, and Mary.

Rachel Bott

I spent this past year in Sweden nurturing a monster. I have dedicated every fiber of my being—mind, body, and soul—to this beast; an obstinate and insatiable creature that some refer to as a "dissertation." My sweet, ravenous little monster has required constant and careful attention. Most importantly, it requires a varied diet, consisting of interdisciplinary scholarship,

every ounce of my energy, and archival materials—its favorite morsels being Swedish ballads and legends. It devours tales of its brethren with unsettling glee: the skogsrå and sjörå, the näcken and the älv, and the werewolf in all his bloody, fetus-eating glory. It delights in hearing how they terrorized man, woman, and child alike—just as it delights in terrorizing me. So, this past

year, with the generous support of the Birgit Baldwin Fellowship and the American-Scandinavian Foundation Fellowship, I brought my unhinged obsession with monsters to Sweden with a singular purpose: feed the beast. I hunted in libraries and archives. I harvested ballads and legends. I chased the monsters lurking on every page. With this invaluable stockpile I now write, dreaming of shuffling off this dissertator's coil, and nurturing a monster that grows into something, perhaps even scholarship.



Nico Borbely

Over the summer, I received a FLAS grant to attend the Uppsala International Summer Session in Uppsala, Sweden for six weeks. The course was divided into language immersion classes in the morning and cultural electives in the afternoon. My afternoon classes of drama in the first session and Swedish folk music in the latter enabled me to greatly deepen my knowledge of Swedish culture and traditions through exposure to local theater and folk music traditions. As I completed the course for credit, I wrote additional individual, research-based assignments in Swedish for my elective courses, focusing on theater organizations and folk music traditions within Sweden's officially recognized minority communities. I finished the program ready to advance to a C1-level class on the CEFR scale. Excursions included as a part of the program additionally cemented our exposure to various additional aspects of life in Sweden, including a historical tour of Vaxholm in the Stockholm Archipelago, numerous museum visits in the capital, and a visit to a moose park in Sala.

My experience at UISS was truly fantastic and I would heartily recommend the program to anyone interested in immersively improving their Swedish language skills or cultural knowledge.



Cait Vitale-Sullivan

In May 2025, I traveled to Sápmi together with professors Tom Dubois, Marcus Cerderström, and Anna Rue from UW Madison, fellow students and instructors from the College of Menominee Nation and Institute for Sustainable Development, a professor from the University of British Columbia, and members of the Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies. The goal of the trip was to connect with researchers, community members, and educators in Sápmi and foster connections and conversations centered around language revitalization and cultural education in Sámi communities and Indigenous communities in the US. The three students from the College of Menominee Nation, Chenoa, Layla, and Dakota, each gave several presentations about their cultural backgrounds and about the Menominee sustainable model.

We arrived in Sápmi when the rivers were high with meltwater and the ground was thick with mud, near the middle of the season *Giddageassi*, or spring-summer, in the month of *miessemánnu*, the month of the reindeer calf. There was still snow on Finnmarksvidda, and the reindeer had retreated to their calving grounds. The forests were just stirring from the winter, and we watched many ptarmigans and mountain hares, some still in their white winter coats, cross the roads under the midnight sun.

In Inari, we visited language nest schools and the (Finnish) Sámi parliament and Siida museum. We visited the rock carvings at Alta, the Sámi University of Applied Sciences in Kautokeino, and the [International Sámi film institute](#) at the [Sámi National Theater](#) in Kautokeino. It was a whirlwind trip that gave me many things to ponder—about education and cultural revitalization, about insider/outsider perspectives, and about what it means to be a people who have lived in a place for so long. I learned so much about not only the Sámi communities we visited, but also about Menominee and Potawatomi communities from Chenoa, Layla, and Dakota. I left with a strong sense of connection to place, a love of the landscapes of Sápmi, and a taste of dried reindeer.



Scott Mellor: Folklife, Identity, and Shifting Boundaries in the Baltic

Scott Mellor’s ongoing research explores how the people of Åland—a small group of islands between Sweden and Finland—understand and express their cultural identity. Åland has shifted national affiliations over the past two centuries, moving from Swedish to Russian to Finnish governance, and now exists within the European Union. Despite these changes, Ålanders have maintained a distinct identity shaped by language, maritime traditions, and movement across borders.

Scott’s project focuses on oral family histories, especially stories tied to the region’s unique Swedish dialect and its rich seafaring past. From the mid-19th to mid-20th centuries, families relied on schooners to trade across the Baltic, fostering both economic

independence and a strong sense of place. Today, Ålanders take pride in their language and heritage, which is neither fully Swedish nor Finnish.

Through interviews with residents—including sea captains, authors, and recent immigrants—Scott examines how identity is shaped by history, language, and travel. His research includes transcribing and archiving these stories, with plans to publish a book and present findings at academic conferences. This research not only preserves Åland’s cultural memory but also highlights how small communities navigate shifting political and cultural landscapes. He has also used his research to teach a few students through independent study, the techniques of this type of humanities research.

Claus Andersen

The Hans Christian Andersen Center in Denmark is housed in a building dating back to 1503. Located in the heart of Odense, the building once served as a convent for unmarried aristocratic women, who devoted themselves to charity work and helping the city’s poorest residents.

From March through June this spring, I was fortunate enough to work every day in this historic building while on sabbatical as a research fellow at the center. And I never got tired of walking up to the to the beautiful red-brick building beside the river every day.

At the center, I worked alongside some of the most dedicated and kind people I have ever met—each focused on different aspects of Hans Christian Andersen’s life and writing. A daily highlight was lunch, when we all gathered in the common room with our lunch boxes. These lunches became informal academic exchanges, where we could ask questions, share

insights, and learn about one another’s projects. I learned so much during those conversations.

Another unforgettable experience was seeing—and even touching—some of Andersen’s original fairytale manuscripts. The encounter moved me more deeply than I had expected, creating a tangible connection to the stories I was studying.

The fruits of my time at the center have already been published in a book on Andersen’s early fairytales, which came out in August. But my work on Andersen is far from over, and I cannot wait to return to the center, which is affiliated with the University of Southern Denmark.

Berit Skogen: Crossings and Connections Conference 2025

To celebrate the 200th Anniversary of the journey of the Restauration ship in 1825 from Norway to the US, St Olaf College hosted a C&C 2025 conference. This conference was part of “Crossings and Connections 200,” a series of commemorations in honor of the beginning of organized migration from Norway to North America. Collaborating with the Norwegian American Historical Association (NAHA), St Olaf welcomed scholars primarily from North America and Norway from June 18-22. Over 85 scholars and 150 attendees, including community members, were present at the conference. From UW-Madison, Dean Krouk, Ida Johnson, and myself attended.

One panel I especially enjoyed was titled “Marriage, Motherhood, and Feminism: Norwegian-Americans and Women’s Rights.” Panelists included Caitlin Sackrison (St. Olaf College), Olivia Gunn (UW-Seattle), Mona Holm (University of Oslo), and Lori Ann Lahlum (MSU-Mankato). I learned more about late 19th/early 20th century US immigration law and gender than I was anticipating, and this led to a very interesting and fruitful discussion at the end of the session. C&C 2025 was an excellent opportunity to connect with colleagues and community members and to consider the future of Norwegian and Norwegian-American Studies.



Thomas DuBois

In the spring semester of 2025 Tom DuBois was on sabbatical leave. He used his time away from teaching to work on several projects. First was completing a short introductory textbook on the topic of Nordic folklore, which will be jointly published by the University of Aarhus Press and University of Wisconsin Press. Second was ongoing ethnographic documentation of Ojibwe winter games traditions at the Lac du Flambeau reservation, including making

a short film for the use of tribal members. Third was preparing for a study trip of students and faculty from the UW and the College of Menominee Nation to Sámi schools and museums in Finland and Norway. And fourth was planning for a new UW learning community called Spark, that focuses on teaching first-year students about the Wisconsin idea. It was a busy but very gratifying semester!

Memory Studies Seminar

by Dean Krouk

Dean Krouk's new topics seminar introduces graduate students to the interdisciplinary field of memory studies. The German cultural theorist Astrid Erll defines memory as "an umbrella term for all those processes of a biological, medial, or social nature which relate past and present (and future) in sociocultural contexts" (Memory in Culture, 7). The eight participants in this seminar come from a variety of graduate programs and work together to explore the key concepts used in the study of social and cultural memory across

various subfields of the humanities. Central ideas include collective memory; trauma; memory of war and violence; postmemory; forgetting; monuments and memorials; and the politics of nostalgia in contemporary societies, including but not limited to the Nordic region. The authors and theorists we read include important figures in the field such as Aleida Assman, Cathy Caruth, Marianne Hirsch, Dominick LaCapra, Viet Thanh Nguyen, Svetlana Boym, Christina Sharpe, and W. G. Sebald.

Race in Scandinavia

by Benjamin Mier-Cruz

This graduate seminar engages foundational and contemporary scholarship on race, racialization, decoloniality, and critical race theory, with a particular focus on the Nordic countries. We will read key texts in critical race studies alongside emerging research on how colonialism, migration, indigeneity, and nation-building intersect in the Nordic context. Although "race" has largely been removed from official categories in the region, reflecting a self-image of egalitarian, antiracist exceptionalism, this avoidance coexists with the persistent racialization of migrants, Muslims, Afro-Nordic communities, Sámi, Roma, and

other minorities. By bringing Nordic perspectives into conversation with global theoretical frameworks, the course examines how local understandings of national identity complicate and expand debates about racial difference, equality, and power. Topics include visual and cultural representation, migration and borders, and the intersections of race with gender, sexuality, class, and language. Taught in English, the seminar is open to graduate students across disciplines and encourages participants to apply theoretical insights to their own fields of study.

Nordic Filmmakers

by Liina-Ly Roos

It has been exciting to teach our new film course, titled "Nordic Filmmakers." Benjamin Mier-Cruz and I proposed this course with the goal to provide our students with a strong understanding and appreciation of the rich film tradition in the Nordic region. Some of the filmmakers discussed in the course include Ingmar Bergman, Aki Kaurismäki, Mai Zetterling, Liselotte Wajstedt, Susani Mahadura, and Anna Hints. Students

in this class get to discuss the changing meaning of and different approaches to film authorship in Nordic cinema, as well as learn about relevant cultural and historical contexts of the films. One of the assignments in the class that has been fun to grade is a short video introduction that the students have to make, pretending that they are presenting a special Nordic cinema feature at a local Madison film festival.

The Cultures of Sustainability Across Europe FIG, taught by Marcus Cederström

First taught as a First-Year Interest Group (FIG) in 2019, Cultures of Sustainability Across Europe has once again partnered with Folklore and Environmental Studies to help students take a close look at what sustainability means in various countries and contexts. Rather than just examine sustainability from an environmental perspective, students are asked to think about sustainability as pluralistic, taking into consideration cultural, linguistic, even economic sustainability. Doing so challenges them to think critically about how communities across Europe are addressing, for better or worse, issues of sustainability.

FIGs are what we consider high-impact practices, that is to say, educational experiences that provide students with evidence-based pedagogies and culturally relevant practices to help them succeed. In Cultures of Sustainability, that means applying what they learn about the European context to their lives here in Wisconsin. Along with reading across disciplines, students have a variety of hands-on experiences. Students learned a variety of folk dances from the regions we studied with help from dance instructor Michael Kuharski and fiddler Mary

Pat Kleven as we discussed the cultural sustainability of immigrant traditions. They paddled a birchbark canoe made by Ojibwe master craftsman Mino-Giizhig (Wayne Valliere) while discussing the canoe cultures of the Veps. They wove on Hello! Looms and made their own zines focusing on sustainable practices after meeting zine-maker Camy Matthay. They also heard from Sámi scholar Silje Solheim Karlsen and were introduced to the collections at Memorial Library by Todd Michelson-Ambelang.

As we look to the future, we recognize that our students must learn not just the content from our courses, but how to make connections between the content and the world around them. Hands-on learning, embodied learning, does just that as students begin to recognize that we learn not just with our minds, but with all of our body. By providing techniques to make the abstract just a little more accessible, we are setting up our students to succeed in a world that requires them to quickly and efficiently learn new skills and apply them in constantly changing contexts.



Faculty and Staff Updates



Claus Elholm Andersen

In the Spring of 2025, Claus Elholm Andersen was visiting fellow at the Hans Christian Andersen Center in Odense, Denmark and in August, he published a book on Andersen's early fairytales. He also co-edited an anthology of Hans Christian Andersen in the US along with Johs. Nørregaard-Frandsen and Torsten Bøgh Thomsen. Back in Madison, he is now the head of the Nordic Unit and associate chair of the Department of German, Nordic, and Slavic+. He often travels the state of Wisconsin, giving talks on the Danish concept of hygge.



Susan Brantly

The secret's out! No longer bound by a non-disclosure agreement, I've enjoyed talking about the role I played in researching a Van Gogh painting purchased at a garage sale in Minnetonka, MN. If you missed my lecture on the Van Gogh mystery from May 5th, [this link](#) will give you another chance! I continue to do research in this area, since the cultural networks I discovered deserve some more attention. On the horizon is my retirement at the end of the fall semester. 38 years is a pretty good run. I look forward to filling an abundance of unstructured time, but I certainly will miss the students.



Marcus Cederström

Marcus Cederström continues his work with the Sustaining Scandinavian Folk Arts in the Upper Midwest project. This past year has included a weeklong tour in Sápmi with colleagues from the College of Menominee Nation; trips around the Upper Midwest for festivals, presentations, and exhibitions; a week of Ojibwe birchbark canoes as part of the Our Shared Waters symposium here on campus; and, of course, there were plenty of public programs with dances, concerts, and even woodcarving, tea-making, and zine-making for students and community members! He's excited about the upcoming spring 2026 symposium on immigration, indigeneity, and education.



Tom DuBois

Tom DuBois spent much time this year mentoring doctoral students. In November 2024, John Prusynski completed his dissertation: "Travel, Movement, and Space in Sámi Literature." In spring 2025, Aili Westbrook completed her dissertation: "Women and Sexual Conformity in Late Medieval Scandinavian Medicine." That same semester, Mirva Johnson completed her dissertation: "Koineization of Reallocation: Finnish American Heritage in Northern Wisconsin." Each study grapples insightfully and innovatively with the workings of tradition, innovation, and identity in the lives of Nordic and Nordic-American people. It will be exciting to see where each of these scholars take their training and talents in coming years!



Helen Durst

Helen Durst has been the Danish lecturer at the University of Wisconsin-Madison since fall 2022. Helen is also a PhD Candidate in Scandinavian languages and literature (with an emphasis in Danish) at the University of Washington. Helen holds an MA in Slavic Studies and Russian from University of Arizona (2020), teaching certificate in Mathematics from Calvin College, and a BA in Russian from University of Iowa. Helen taught mathematics at Grandville High School for 16 years before returning to Academia. She is currently working on her dissertation *Under the Umbrella: Intertextuality and Materiality in Tove Ditlevsen's Works* on 20th century Danish writer Tove Ditlevsen, author of *The Copenhagen Trilogy*.



Rebecca Forbes Wank

Rebecca is the financial specialist in the department. She also handles reimbursements and guest travel for the department and the funds at the Foundation. Outside of work, she and her husband are bird paparazzi (his words), and she plays the mandolin (and sometimes fiddle) in a contra dance band and at every jam session she can find. She is looking forward to walking the Camino in Spain one day.



Ida Moen Johnson

I was promoted to Teaching Assistant Professor in January of 2025 and I'm happy to be in my fifth year at UW-Madison. In addition to teaching Norwegian, I enjoy teaching courses on The Nordic Child and Humans and Other Animals in Nordic Literature and Film. I'm currently at work on a scholarly article title "Naked Bodies, Climate Crisis" about two recent Norwegian TV shows for kids, which I hope to submit for review in December. Outside of work, I enjoy spending time with my husband and young daughter and getting to know the Madison community.



Dean Krouk

In addition to teaching, serving as the associate chair in GNS+ (until summer 2025), and managing the journal *Scandinavian Studies*, Dean Krouk has continued to deepen his research in two main areas. The first is the literature and cultural memory of WWII in Norway, which is a vast topic that he has been interested in for many years. The second is the drama of Henrik Ibsen. Dean has also given a variety of talks on topics related to anti-Nazism in the 1930s and 1940s and WWII resistance movements in Scandinavia. In fall 2025, Dean taught a graduate seminar about the interdisciplinary field of "Memory Studies" (see pg 22). One thing he is looking forward to in spring 2026 is teaching "The Drama of Henrik Ibsen" again for the first time in four years.



Mark Mears

Mark Mears is the Graduate Coordinator for German, Nordic, and Slavic+ since it formed in 2016. Prior to that he was the Graduate Coordinator for the German Department and has worked at UW-Madison for over 30 years. He is the first contact for all graduate student admissions, and he assists current graduate students with navigating both Department and Graduate School policies and procedures from their initial recruitment to their final graduation. He is also the Curricular Representative for GNS+ and responsible for posting course offerings to the University’s Catalog of Courses each term and for classroom scheduling. In his leisure time Mark enjoys hiking, pickleball, and camping, with family and friends.



Scott Mellor

Scott Mellor serves as faculty director of the Norden Language Floor in the International Learning Community. He also teaches a First-Year Interest Group on medieval Nordic sagas and their pop culture representations through gaming. He led the 2025 Summer Launch study abroad to Stockholm and the Baltic and will return in 2026. This fall, he launched a new course on narrative structure, imagery, and gaming. Scott is past president and current CFO of the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study. His research explores oral family histories in Åland, Finland, focusing on language, ships, culture, and identity.



Todd Michelson-Ambelang

Todd Michelson-Ambelang is currently on a research trip/post-doc in Germany where he is working at the German National Literary Archives and is looking into the journals of Rainer Maria Rilke’s time in Scandinavia and influences on his work by Scandinavian authors. He is also working on research for a few articles and will be spending a month and a half in Madison each semester, so that he can teach students how to use libraries. He is also working with the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study to make sure that conferences are more accessible to members with disabilities and impairments.



Benjamin Mier-Cruz

Benjamin Mier-Cruz is Assistant Professor of Scandinavian Studies and Gender and Women’s Studies. Their research interests are Nordic cinema and queer and transgender cinema with a focus on filmmakers of color. Benjamin’s current book project explores race, gender, and sexuality in documentaries and short films by Swedish filmmakers of color. Their additional research interests include transgender studies, queer theory, Black feminist theory, vampire literature, and German literature and film. Benjamin is impatiently looking forward to fall and winter sweater weather.



Liina-Ly Roos

Liina-Ly Roos was thrilled to see her first book, *The Not-Quite Child: Colonial Histories, Racialization, and Swedish Exceptionalism* (University of Washington Press) published in August 2025. She also enjoyed the opportunity to teach the graduate professionalization seminar in the spring and is currently teaching “Second Year Swedish” and “Sexual Politics in Scandinavia” with wonderful groups of curious and hard-working students. Liina-Ly is looking forward to working more on her second book project that focuses on the politics of health and gender in Northern European cultures; and to leading the first Study Abroad program to Estonia in June 2026.



Nick Schultz

Nick has been with GNS+ as Department Administrator since fall 2022. When not at work he enjoys playing games (sports, board, video, all kinds!), traveling, and doing dad things with his two kids. Nick’s looking forward to another successful year at GNS+ and to the continued transition to Workday, the UW’s new administrative system!



Joanna Schuth

Joanna Schuth is the undergraduate advisor for the Scandinavian Studies major and the Languages and Cultures of Northern Europe certificate. She has been with GNS+ since 2019 and is the point of contact for all students in the department’s eight undergrad majors and certificates. When not at work, she lives with her husband, daughter, and cat on the East Side of Madison, where she foists classical music on her kid, dreams of summer, and has too many books on her nightstand.



Jenna Sorensen

Jenna Sorensen is the Media Designer for GNS+, joining the department in July 2022. She creates promotional materials for courses and events, maintains the GNS+ website, manages the GNS+ social media accounts, and designs and sends out the department newsletters. This year, she’s looking forward to continuing to learn how to bake, as she’s really bad at it but really wants to improve.



Kirsten Wolf

Kirsten Wolf is happy to be teaching fulltime again after having served as Chair of the Department of Art History for three years. This semester, she is teaching “Introduction to Scandinavian Linguistics” and “Paleography and Philology.” In addition, she is advising a number of MA and PhD students. Kirsten’s summer was uneventful and dedicated solely to research, as research projects had begun to pile up. Aside from a few trips to Milwaukee to be with her son, she spent the entire summer in Madison. Kirsten is looking forward to finishing up the book project “Three Humanist Compendia in Icelandic Translation,” which she is co-authoring with Professor Dario Bullitta.



Elliott Brandsma

Elliott Brandsma is a dissertator on the Literature and Cultural Studies track, specializing in twentieth century Swedish, Finnish and Icelandic literature. He is looking forward to spending his last year as a graduate student at UW—Madison in Helsinki, Finland, where he is studying Finnish and conducting archival research for his final dissertation chapter. He is also a visiting researcher at the University of Helsinki’s Department of Scandinavian Studies.



Shawn Hansen

Shawn Hansen is a PhD candidate on the Folklore track, after earning his MA degree from the program earlier this year. His academic interests include mythology, folktales, religious studies, sacred places, theatre and film. He was the primary instructor for Folklore 100 this past summer, and will spend the 2025-26 academic year as the editorial assistant for the journal *Scandinavian Studies*. Shawn is looking forward to watching Guillermo del Toro’s film adaptation of *Frankenstein*, which is scheduled to be released in late 2025.



Mirva Johnson

Mirva Johnson is a PhD Candidate on the Folklore track. She has spent this past year teaching elementary Finnish at UW-Madison. Her dissertation examines linguistic and cultural change in Finnish American communities in northern Wisconsin and Minnesota.



Svea Larson

Svea Larson is a dissertator on the folklore track. Her project examines Swedish and Swedish-American domestic labor and foodways in the early twentieth century through published and personalized recipe collections. In Spring 2025, she had a blast as a first-time instructor of record for History of Fashion but has been enjoying focusing on writing (and baking) over the summer and fall and hopes to be able to serve up a finished dissertation in May!



Erica Li

Erica Li is a PhD Candidate on the Literary Studies track. Her research focuses on non-bourgeois figures in nineteenth-century Norwegian literature. She looks forward to establishing a more productive and balanced daily routine.

Graduate Student Updates



Emily Beyer

This year, I am looking forward to working on my dissertation. I also cherish my time as a program assistant for the Journal of English and Germanic Philology at the heart of research.



Nico Borbely

Nico Borbely is a second year MA/PhD student on the philology track. His main research interests include both historical and historical sociolinguistics, indigenous and endangered language reclamation efforts, multilingualism, migration and identity studies, and dialectology. He is looking forward to attending the ASTRA conference for the first time in fall 2025.



Rachel Bott

Rachel Bott has returned from a year of archival research in Sweden. This year she is teaching first-year Swedish and working on her dissertation. She looks forward to writing and spending time with her beloved monsters of Swedish ballads.



Holly McArthur

Holly McArthur is working on wrapping up her dissertation project, a new critical edition of Flóvents saga, after a year of research as a Leifur Eiríksson Fellow spent mostly in Iceland. She is back in Madison now to teach about essay composition and vampires and is looking forward to wrapping up multiple big projects in the coming months.



Berit Skogen

Berit Skogen is a second-year MA/PhD student focusing on contemporary Norwegian literature and media. She is interested in the narratives around multiculturalism in Norway and teaches Norwegian language. She is looking forward to the winter months and hoping for more snow in Madison this year.



Drew Swasey

Drew Swasey is a second-year master’s student focused on the medical humanities, particularly on how themes of disease, epidemiological history, and memory intersect with literature and culture in Sweden. Looking ahead, Drew is eager to complete her master’s exam and thesis, and she is especially excited about the DC Universe revamp and its upcoming projects.



Cait Vitale-Sullivan

Cait Vitale-Sullivan is a second year PhD student on the folklore track. She is interested in Nordic folk music pedagogy and the ways in which folk music teaching can be supplemented with art methods from other fields, such as dance and visual arts, to create spaces of embodied practice. This semester, her eyes have been opened by the work of Lynda Barry and she is looking forward to thinking through her upcoming PhD proposal using comics as a medium of exploration.



Benjamin Wilson

Benjamin Wilson is a PhD student in Scandinavian Studies on the philology track with a PhD minor in Medieval Studies. His studies focus on Old Norse-Icelandic literature, with an interest in clothing and the systems of power it can represent. He is looking forward to completing his preliminary exams in the spring and beginning work on his dissertation!



Richelle Wilson

Richelle Wilson is a producer at Wisconsin Public Radio and a PhD candidate wrapping up a dissertation about IKEA in literature and culture. This year for Christmas, she hopes to give herself the gift of a completed degree. After that, she is looking forward to more time for leisure reading and a belated honeymoon trip to Sweden.

Congratulations to those who earned their degree in Scandinavian Studies and certificate in the Languages and Cultures of Northern Europe in Spring/Summer 2025.

Gratulerer!

Amanda Chastan
BA in Scandinavian Studies

Daisy Jagodish
LCNE Certificate

Jessica Chudy
Additional Major in Scandinavian Studies

Joe Schmalstig
BS in Scandinavian Studies

Lexi Englebert
LCNE Certificate

Michael Motschenbacher
LCNE Certificate

Nicholas Marston
BS in Scandinavian Studies

Riley Lynch
LCNE Certificate

Robin Jolly
LCNE Certificate

Sunshine Prost
BS in Scandinavian Studies

Support Scandinavian Studies

Our sincere thanks to the many alumni and friends who have generously supported Scandinavian Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Private gifts are increasingly critical to ensuring that we maintain our stature as one of the nation’s best Scandinavian Studies programs. Your donations help us attract top faculty and graduate students, support our amazing undergraduate majors, and host a stimulating series of lectures, symposia, and other scholarly activities. Gifts of any size are most welcome and gratefully received. There are several options if you’d like to donate.

If you wish to contribute online, please go to the University Foundation at:
secure.supportuw.org/give/?id=af418b3b-a1b9-406a-a071-414d6f9cc04a

Or scan this QR code:



For more information on making a gift of securities or including Scandinavian Studies in your estate plans, please contact:

Marit Barkve
Senior Development Program Manager
University of Wisconsin Foundation
1848 University Avenue
Madison, WI 53726
Phone: 608.308.5320
Fax: 608.263.0781
marit.barkve@supportuw.org

Scandinavian Studies Newsletter Committee

Ida Moen Johnson
Svea Larson
Cait Vitale-Sullivan

Layout/design by Jenna Sorensen

Be sure to check out gns.wisc.edu/gns-newsletters
for past newsletters and our upcoming issues.

University of Wisconsin-Madison
Department of German, Nordic, and Slavic+
814 Van Hise Hall
1220 Linden Drive
Madison, WI 53706
Email: info@gns.wisc.edu
Phone: 608-262-2192



Department of
German, Nordic, and Slavic+
COLLEGE OF LETTERS & SCIENCE
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON